



Introduction to “Education”

Education is the means by which children are brought fully into society. The original Latin, from which the English word “education” is derived, means “leading out”.

The ruling ideas of any class-divided society are the ideas of its ruling class. Modern society is bourgeois, and so education in modern society is set up to transfer the ruling, bourgeois ideas to each new generation.

Because bourgeois society frames the individual as the basic productive economic unit of society, in the form of commodity labour-power for sale in the labour market, education in bourgeois society must validate this anti-

human, anti-social self-understanding of the individual, and of each one by the others.

In bourgeois society, people are supposed to be “alone together”.

Two principles, first, the social imperative of education in general, and second, the commodification of the individual person, are at odds in bourgeois society. They co-exist, they cannot be reconciled, so they conflict.

In parallel with this contradiction, is another contradiction. The method of education is dialogical interaction between people. The educational process is a human relationship of the most tender, compassionate kind. It is social.

Yet the obligatory formation of commodity labour power as a function of bourgeois education renders the loved and loving human into an item for sale. In the exchange of commodity labour-power for money, the distortion of the human social relationship is hidden away under the appearance of a relationship between things.

The formation of commodity labour power is a process which renders the teacher into a transient part of the process. The human relationship is abandoned, leaving the student with skill, or knowledge, an abstract quality which is no longer human. This skill or knowledge is an attribute that is commensurable with the same attribute, present in other individuals. It can be measured. Students in South Africa can

be compared with students in Japan, North or South America, India and Sweden, or any other place.

This is done by what are known as examinations.

As with torture, the results of examinations are unreliable. Yet, like torture, they continue to be used everywhere. The practice of examination is increasing in bourgeois society, not decreasing. In Britain, children as young as five are being required to pass examinations, and if they fail the examinations, there are lifelong consequences for those little children.

Revolutionary education

A revolutionary form of education would reverse the priority of bourgeois education, so that the socialisation of the children was given priority over the rendering of each child into a piece of commensurable commodity labour-power.

The prerequisites for such revolutionary education would include a strong ideology of education within the teaching corps. In South Africa this ideology is tacit, not explicit. It is not that there is an overtly bourgeois “pedagogy of the bourgeoisie”. It is rather that there is a scarcity of openly-expressed educational theory of any kind.

Reactionaries and progressives combine to affirm the necessity of being “professional”, as measured by an eclectic mixture of empirical criteria. But there is little dialogue about

the fundamental theory of education: What is it for? What is it about?

Education in South Africa is supposed to be “societal”, but “societal” reverts instantly to “parents-and-teachers”, to narrow concerns about career prospects, and so it inevitably re-enters the confines of bourgeois utilitarianism.

Ours is a political course that explores the place of education within the polity of human society. It may draw the conclusion that there is no dividing line between education and politics – as Lenin, for example, thought.

It should at least discover the prerequisites for a revolutionary education.

Like the other fifteen main CU courses, the Education course is in ten parts, serialised over ten weeks. There will be a main item in each part, supported by up to three additional or alternative items. Each item will be an original text, sent out with a brief introduction or “opening to discussion”.

The whole course can be downloaded in the form of PDF files, printable as booklets, from:

<http://studycircle.wikispaces.com/23+Education>